

VZCZCXRO1160
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHDK #1324 3191316
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141316Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1443
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1157

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAKAR 001324

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/12/2018
TAGS: [KOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PU](#) [XY](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU ELECTIONS COULD PROMPT UNEASE IN
ARMED FORCES

Classified By: Classified by DCM Jay Smith for reasons 1.5 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Threatened by the likely victory of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in the November 16, 2008 legislative elections, a handful of insecure Bissau Guinean army officers theoretically could be persuaded to take action to forestall PAIGC-promised reforms to the military (although resident French, Spanish, Portuguese diplomats and intelligence personnel, resident UN officials, as well as Bissau-Guinean political leaders of all the major parties believe this is unlikely). The popular army chief of staff, Tagme Na Wai, who commands great loyalty within the armed forces, has cautioned his soldiers to accept without question the outcome of the election. Nonetheless, Post has coordinated with the French Embassy in Bissau to discuss any potential contingencies involving the tiny resident American community.
END SUMMARY.

ARMED FORCES NEED TO BE REFORMED AND REDUCED IN SIZE

¶2. (SBU) The armed forces of Guinea-Bissau are in dire need of reform. The current size of 4,500 soldiers is non-commensurate to any likely threat and fiscally unsustainable. The EU-led security sector reform mission and the UN is recommending that the armed forces be reduced to 3,500 personnel. Moreover, the army is top-heavy, with over half of the members being officers, and over half of the officers being at a rank of colonel or above. The army is also dominated by a single ethnic group, the Balanta, which constitutes 30 percent of the population as a whole. In the Guinea-Bissau context, reforming the military will likely mean massive demobilization, decommissioning, and a rebalancing of the ethnic composition.

¶3. (SBU) Politically, security sector reform is being championed by PAIGC, while the pro-Balanta Party for Social Renewal (PRS) is more ambivalent towards reform. Indeed, it was under a PRS government led by former President Kumba Yala that the military became bloated, top-heavy and ethnically unbalanced.

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

¶4. (C) Against this backdrop, in the lead-up to the November 16 legislative elections, the PAIGC is poised possibly to win an outright majority, or at a minimum command a strong position in a coalition government, likely with the like-minded Republican Party for Independence and Development (PRID), which is made up mostly of PAIGC dissidents. Conversely, the PRS, champion of the members of the armed forces, appears fractured and headed towards a poor showing on the November 16 poll. PRS president, Kumba Yala, who returned to self-imposed exile in Morocco following his conversion to Islam and amid allegations of his ties to a

failed August 2008 coup, returned to Bissau in early November, 2008.

¶5. (C) Given the possibility of demobilization and decommissioning represented by a PAIGC government, military officers theoretically could be moved to consider options to counter the threat to the current status quo in the armed forces. Although highly unlikely, one option may be military insubordination following the election in the event of a PAIGC victory. In the remote chance that soldiers were to provoke unrest, it is unlikely that the popular Army Chief of Staff, Tagme Na Wai, who commands great loyalty within the armed forces, would support such a move. Indeed, Na Wai traveled the country in early November, meeting with his soldiers reportedly to caution them to support unequivocally the election results.

¶6. (C) Given the remote possibility of the November 16 election prompting military unrest, the Canadian, British, and German missions to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau have consulted to discuss possible contingencies for their citizens in Guinea-Bissau. Post has coordinated with the French Embassy in Bissau, which would have the lead in responding in the remote possibility of unrest breaking out.
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